

So earlier in the service we have discussed discipleship as an encounter and a need, but, as this passage makes clear, it is also a response.

We come to Jesus with a need, whether that is security, forgiveness, understanding, or purpose, or any number of things. We come before Jesus carrying who we are and all the things that life has given us, good and bad. Each of those needs, each of those aspects of who we are, come face to face with Jesus. And, if we are here today, then that has changed us. Perhaps significantly, perhaps just a little. But something in the God that we met made an impact on us. And we are left with the question of how we respond to the God we have encountered.

Today's passage suggests that that response should be quite extreme. Bonhoeffer, who wrestled with the expectations of discipleship throughout his life, explores these three unnamed enquirers by suggesting that the first is keen, they do not wait to be asked but offer themselves in service to Jesus, yet Jesus' reply demonstrates that they do not know what they are getting themselves in for, "the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." This enquirer does not understand what they will have to give up to be a disciple. The second is invited by Jesus but they are aware of their obligation to the Law of the Old Testament, "First let me go and bury my father." Jesus' reply shows that even the law cannot get in the way of discipleship. There is no higher authority than Jesus. The third again offers themselves, but only with conditions, "first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." But, it would seem we do not have the luxury of setting the boundaries of our obedience. For Bonhoeffer these verses are an example of the total claim that discipleship has over your life. In those three interactions with Jesus, we see the call to surrender our security, give our obedience to Jesus, and relinquish our right to put conditions on our discipleship.

I doubt any of us take those as words of comfort. Is this really what discipleship demands of us? I wonder what following Jesus looked like in your experience? As you reflect on those who have modelled discipleship to you, in what ways have they reflected these verses? What has been sacrificed? What were the boundaries of their obedience? How unconditionally did they follow Jesus?

Bonhoeffer has more to say about these verses because he, like us, is wrestling with the tension of recognising these words as true but also recognising that the call to discipleship does not always mean an abandonment of home, obligations, and family. So Bonhoeffer suggests that the questions asked by these encounters are unanswerable, they can be taken neither literally nor metaphorically. We cannot say that you must follow these commands in order to enter into discipleship but neither can we say that you are not being asked to surrender everything and follow Jesus. This irresolvable question, pushes us not to turn to set rules or models of discipleship but towards what is being asked of us, personally by Jesus. But that in itself creates many questions about how we hear the call of Jesus.

Pete Grieg, the founder of the 24/7 prayer movement tells a story of a time he felt called to go to a roadside restaurant with a sense that he was to talk to the people he met about Jesus. Unfortunately, despite trying to start up conversations, no one was interested in having a conversation. As he reflects upon this moment, he wonders if God wasn't asking him to go to that restaurant at all, he was completely misguided in that interpretation. But perhaps, in his misunderstanding, he learnt something of what it meant to be a disciple. To be more curious about what Jesus might be asking of us, than worried about what we are leaving behind.

We also gain insight into what it means to be a disciple from this chapter of Luke as a whole. These verses come at the end of a chapter in which the disciples begin to take on the mission of Jesus. At the start of the chapter, Jesus sends out the twelve to proclaim the kingdom of God, then comes the story of the feeding of the five thousand in which Jesus says to them, "Well, you give them something to eat." Then after the Transfiguration, a moment when the true divinity of Jesus is displayed, the disciples then fail to drive out a demon. Then, the opposite happens, someone who is not a recognised follower of Jesus is able to drive out demons and the disciples get all defensive. All through this chapter, the twelve disciples are taking faltering steps to adopt Jesus' ministry for themselves, all while their understanding of who Jesus is is being expanded and developed. It is into that unfolding story of discipleship that these verses come.

These verses lay on us the total claim of Jesus upon us, but the example of discipleship we are given is of faltering, misguided, and yet somehow revelatory steps of ordinary people.

This context enlivens me to an aspect of these verses that we have yet to touch on. Namely, the silences. While commentators assume a negative response, we don't hear how any of these three enquirers reacted to Jesus' comments.

These silences are pregnant with possibility they have the capacity to demonstrate the same faltering steps that the disciples have themselves shown. Perhaps, the first enquirer could not go along with the itinerant lifestyle of Jesus. Perhaps they fell in step behind Jesus. We know that disciples could have done either; Mary and Martha, by the very narrative of hosting Jesus in their home, show us that disciples can have a roof over their head. Maybe the second enquirer could not abandon their family at this time of grief, yet like Joseph of Arimathea was there to minister to Jesus in his own death. Maybe the third enquirer surrendered their conditions, perhaps they defended Jesus within their social circles like Nicodemus.

While not wishing to detract from the clear depiction of the obligations of discipleship, these silences nonetheless introduces a sense that these calls to discipleship are not closed. That the call of Jesus lingers on in each and every life, beyond any one moment of decision. These silences and the context of the chapter, opens up this sense of dynamic discipleship that extends beyond any one individual moment.

Each enquirer, whatever has led them to seek after Jesus, has come face to face with the Lord. Each has been shown what it means to follow Christ, each has been left with a question.

We may not always understand or be able to make the commitment on the scale this passage demands of us. And that should niggle at us, that should make us uncomfortable, but at the same time we should appreciate the journey the disciples are on throughout this chapter of Luke, we should look and see how discipleship is modelled around us. In so doing, we begin to see the space we have to move in step with Jesus. Not perfectly, perhaps not even radically, but nonetheless, eager to

discover the road that Jesus beckons us to walk down. These verses make it clear the extent of Jesus' call, but the Gospel shows us the unfolding of our lives in Christ.

So let your life unfold in him, be open to the steps that Jesus asks you to take, be attentive to him as best you can. For this is life, which takes many paths, let Christ be your guide.

Amen.